

AVOIDING THE RISK OF INFECTION WHEN WORKING WITH POULTRY THAT IS SUSPECTED OF HAVING HIGHLY PATHOGENIC AVIAN INFLUENZA (HPAI)

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This guidance applies to all persons working commercially with poultry including the self-employed. Veterinary surgeons and other people working with poultry and birds will also wish to take this guidance into account when undertaking their own risk assessments of safe working practices.

This guidance note has been produced by a Government & Industry Working Group consisting of representatives from the National Farmers Union (NFU), British Egg Industry Council (BEIC), British Poultry Council (BPC), Health and Safety Executive (HSE), Health Protection Agency (HPA), Department of Health (DH), Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and the State Veterinary Service (SVS)

Good occupational hygiene precautions that should routinely be used when working with poultry to avoid other zoonotic diseases will also control the risk of exposure to highly pathogenic avian influenza.

Routes of Infection

Even when disease is confirmed, the risk for any one person working with infected birds is low. The severity of any illness that arises will vary according to the exact type of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) present. HPAI transmission to poultry workers is by direct contact with sick and dead or dying infected birds or infected bird products (principally droppings and respiratory secretions). As the virus can live on for a while in the environment it is likely that infection can spread from surfaces, dust, etc freshly contaminated with such bird products.

Be vigilant

Look out for signs of disease in your flock. Indicators may include increased mortality, falling egg production and respiratory distress.

Action to take if you suspect disease:

- a) ask your vet for advice immediately and if you suspect avian influenza you must inform the Divisional Veterinary Manager (DVM) at the local Animal Health Divisional Office without delay;
- b) minimise the number of people potentially exposed to the virus – where possible keep people away from the potentially infected poultry;
- c) do not move poultry, poultry products, manure/litter or other livestock from the premises;

If infection with HPAI is suspected a State Veterinary Service (SVS) vet will visit the farm and, as well as inspecting the birds, will advise you what other measures need to be taken. If a notifiable disease such as HPAI is suspected, the premises will be placed under restriction and samples will be taken for analysis;

Avoiding risks to your health

Wear the correct PPE. If you have to enter the environment in which the potentially infected poultry is kept or you are in close contact with potentially infected birds or bird products, then the same standard of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) must be worn as would be the case if the presence of HPAI had been confirmed;

PPE should be worn at all times when working in a potentially infected environment. Typically, this will comprise of disposable or polycotton coveralls with head coverage of CE type 5 & 6 that offer protection against dusts, splashes and liquid sprays (with, as appropriate, safe disposal or cleaning after use); disposable gloves of lightweight nitrile or vinyl or heavy duty rubber (not latex) gloves that can be disinfected; rubber or polyurethane boots that can be cleaned and disinfected; a FFP3 respirator with exhalation valve in conjunction with close fitting goggles or other equipment that gives at least the same level of protection. All PPE should be appropriately fit-tested to the person.



Coveralls, gloves, waterproof footwear and face-fitted respiratory protective equipment and goggles.



Waterproof and washable footwear



Choose the most appropriate glove for the task.



Hand hygiene measures (hand washing) should be performed after removal of PPE.

Put on and remove PPE in the correct order

You should be trained in proper techniques of donning, removing and disposing of PPE, without contaminating yourself. The following is a summary of the recommended order of removal of protective equipment:

1. Remove gloves
2. Remove gown/overalls
3. Wash/decontaminate hands
4. Remove eye protection
5. Remove mask/respirator
6. Wash/decontaminate hands again

Dispose of all PPE safely

Actions when HPAI infection in poultry is confirmed

If HPAI infection in poultry is confirmed, Defra and the SVS will arrange for the poultry on that farm and any direct contact birds to be humanely killed and transported to specialist incineration or rendering facilities for disposal. Any eggs on the premises will also be removed and disposed. The buildings and equipment will then be sprayed with disinfectant and the farmer will then arrange for the premises to be thoroughly cleansed and disinfected under the supervision of a SVS vet.

Vaccination and use of anti-virals

There is *currently no vaccine that will protect workers from HPAI*. When an outbreak of HPAI is confirmed, poultry workers on the infected farm together with vets, contractors and other people engaged in disease control activities will be offered antiviral therapy e.g. Oseltamivir (Tamiflu®) and seasonal influenza vaccine within 24 – 48 hours of disease confirmation.

Seasonal influenza vaccine will not protect against the HPAI, but is offered to guard against the possibility of simultaneous infection with seasonal flu, and will reduce the risk of mixing and re-assortment of the avian influenza virus., i.e. there is a risk that if a person becomes infected with both HPAI and human flu that a re-assortment of the genetic material of the viruses may result in a new strain that can be transmitted directly from human to human potentially leading to a flu pandemic.

Antiviral drugs and seasonal influenza vaccine will be made available and administered through the Health Protection Agency's (HPA) local Health Protection Units in collaboration with the NHS.

Risks to others

If this guidance is followed, the risks of infection of friends and family members who are not exposed to infected poultry are believed to be negligible. Furthermore, all people potentially exposed to the HPAI virus on an infected farm will be traced and their health status will be checked and monitored.